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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 14, 1959

SUBJECT: Berlin Contingency Planning; The German Problem.

JAN 20 1959

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Olivier Manet, Counselor, French Embassy  
Mr. Foy D. Kohler, EUR  
Mr. Alfred G. Vigderman, GER

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Mr. Manet called to discuss the Secretary's press conference of yesterday and to inquire whether the United States position on German reunification via free elections had changed. Mr. Kohler replied that the short answer was no, but we think we should all be reviewing the German problem as a whole to see whether there are other ways to achieve our objectives. It was important that the West Germans begin to think about what might be done. What was perfectly clear was that we could not yield at all on our position on Berlin. What we had to ask ourselves was whether we could put forward a formula for Germany as a whole which would expose the stupidity of the Soviet position on Germany. Could we, for example, take advantage of the tremendous magnetism which West Germany must have for the overwhelming majority of East Germans. We did not want to provoke too sharp a German reaction in making proposals, but it was good to get the Germans thinking about this subject a little more.

Mr. Kohler said we should not fear a Four Power meeting. We might utilize it very much to our own advantage if we go with good proposals. But about Berlin, we must make up our minds and let the Russians know unequivocally that we have made up our minds. It was extremely dangerous to announce that Berlin is casus belli, when we have not yet really taken the decision to make it one. This is especially dangerous as Soviet intelligence has learned or will learn that we haven't made up our minds.

Mr. Manet asked what Mr. Kohler thought of the position Ambassador Alphand had

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advanced in the latest meeting on contingency plans. Mr. Kohler said the words were good, but it puts off the decision. As concerns Berlin, there was no room for military decisions. Berlin was indefensible militarily. It was, therefore, understandable that military people could not formulate plans they could heartily endorse. You had to approach it the other way and first make the political decision that Berlin was vital to your security and position, and then tell your military people of the decision.

Mr. Kohler emphasized that Berlin presented a perfect case for joint political and strategic planning, that we had extensively consulted and were continuing to consult our allies and we are hoping that they will embrace the opportunity to participate with us constructively in planning. Mr. Manet observed that it is conceivable that the French position would have been somewhat different, if the Secretary had raised the issue with General de Gaulle.

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